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ABSTRACT

This bulletin focuses on the role that community plays in creating a positive school environment. Drawing from research and practice, it offers insights and suggestions for helping children form social bonds, instilling in them core values, and serving as a safe haven for those students whose home lives lack a sense of safety. The bulletin begins with a brief discussion of the term "school community." Chapter 1 outlines the essential characteristics of community and notes the difficulties of defining the boundaries of school community. Chapter 2 provides evidence in support of the benefits of a strong school community. The third chapter presents three case studies in community-building, which offer working models that administrators and practitioners can use in selecting and developing strategies in their own schools. Profiles of two principals are offered in chapter 4, in which the innovative strategies the principals used to create a caring environment for students is described. Chapter 5 offers recommendations for developing a strong sense of community within the school. Suggestions focus not only on forging bonds among people but on creating a sense of place. (Contains 41 references.) (LMI)

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EVERY SCHOOL A COMMUNITY

The Academic Value of Strong Social Bonds Among Staff and Students

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October 1995 • Volume 39, Number 1

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Stephen Stolp

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Preface

Young people in America today are vulnerable to a host of social ills. Local communities are turning to schools for help with social problems such as drug abuse, gang violence, teen pregnancy, and child abuse. Schools without solutions often find themselves targeted as part of the problem. Administrators must rely on teachers and staff members who are overworked and underpaid to address these issues.

This issue of the OSSC Bulletin was cooperatively prepared by OSSC and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management (ERIC/CEM) at the University of Oregon. This Bulletin guides leaders in building a social structure in their schools that can ameliorate some of these problems. Drawing from research and practice, it offers insights and suggestions for helping children form social bonds, instilling in them core values, and serving as a safe haven for those students whose home lives lack a sense of safety and security.

Stephen Stolp is an assistant professor in the Academic Advising Office at the University of Oregon. He received his doctoral degree in teacher education from the University of Oregon in 1993. He has written articles and brochures on a variety of topics, including educational culture and climate, outcome-based education, school reform, education for a sense of place, and the use of metaphors in the classroom.

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Introduction

"Why do good people go to private schools to teach, even though salaries are considerably lower than at public schools?" This was the question posed by Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, in the August 1993 *Harper's*. His answer was simple: "There is no professional community" in public schools.

As public schools are engaged in yet another period of educational reform, many questions—from funding and school choice to moral direction and campus violence—remain unanswered. At the heart of many of these concerns lies the role of community in the school. What is *school community*? And how should a school leader build and maintain a true sense of community in the school?

This Bulletin focuses on the role community plays in creating a positive school environment. It begins with a brief discussion of the term *school community*. Chapter 1 outlines the essential characteristics of community and notes the difficulties of defining the boundaries of school community.

Chapter 2 marshals evidence in support of the benefits of a strong school community. Research suggests that teachers, students, and staff are more motivated, more successful, and happier when the school community is healthy. Community-building in schools, therefore, should be viewed by administrators as an important endeavor.

Chapter 3 looks at three case studies in community-building. The case studies describe successes and failures at Southern Elementary School, Northwest Middle School, and Western High School. These schools offer some working models that administrators and practitioners can use in selecting and developing strategies for building community in their own schools.

Chapter 4 profiles two principals (of an elementary school and a high school), describing the innovative strategies they use to create a caring environment for students.

Many leaders are interested in improving the social bonds among teachers, students, and staff, but they are unsure how to proceed. Chapter 5

offers recommendations for developing a strong sense of community within the school. Suggestions focus not only on forging bonds among people but on creating a sense of place.

School community, like other concepts that require large-scale change in the school environment, can seem ambiguous and often impractical. Those who spend time engaged in daily administrative procedures, student discipline, and staff meetings may underestimate the dedication necessary to build a strong school community. Others may see the time commitment as too great. But Botstein reminds administrators trapped in bureaucratic minutiae that the dedication and commitment required to build school community is worth the time invested. "We have to struggle with our own sense of pessimism as adults and create an environment that is much more about hope."

Making large-scale changes poses risks as well as promise for administrators. Those willing to make the commitment can start small, make changes that count, and build a community that springs from a foundation of hope.

Chapter 1

What Is School Community?

People who work in schools find themselves in a wide array of social contexts. Conferences, staff meetings, board affiliations, assemblies, conventions, and special committees are but a few of the responsibilities of committed professionals. These institutional memberships require time and energy, but even when everyone is dedicated, there is no guarantee those involved will work together cooperatively and productively.

In such situations, school leaders are confronted with the challenging task of building a strong educational community. The job is complex because people are not malleable like clay. A critical role of the school principal is to facilitate and guide action among diverse members in the organization and to offer inspiration and direction when staff members need it. But how and where does this process begin?

Leaders can start by considering the meaning of *community*, a powerful term that is in danger of becoming trivialized from overuse. Indeed, community-building has become a byword of the current educational reform movement. As Valerie Lee and Julia Smith (1994) note, "To counter the problems of bureaucracy, many educators and reformers are moving toward support for a 'communal' model of school structure."

This chapter provides a template for identifying and understanding *school community*. When considering what school community means, it is important to remember that no single model will fit all schools. That is, elements that produce a healthy community in one school may not work for another. One school community may thrive on competition, while another may function best through consensus-building. The form that community assumes matters less than the presence of commitment and strong social bonds.

A Shared Sense of Purpose

The term *community* has broad application. We live in communities defined by political, geographic, economic, and relational boundaries. Neighborhoods where people invest their time and energy can possess a sense of community. Community can also take the form of people in an organization working toward a common goal. A church where people worship and share spiritual beliefs can be a community as well. But neighborhoods, work environments, churches, and schools can also be void of community. Without caring people committed to forming strong social bonds, an organization is just a collection of isolated individuals.

A *community* is a unique organization of people defined by bonds of commitment and cooperation. In addition, a *school community* is defined by a shared sense of purpose. Anthony S. Bryk and Mary Erina Driscoll (1988) define school community as follows:

> A social organization consisting of cooperative relations among adults who share a common purpose and where daily life for both adults and students is organized in ways which foster commitment among its members.

In a school community, people not only teach, learn, and work together—their common goal; they also share a commitment to care for one another.

Bryk and Driscoll's definition provides a starting point for understanding what a school community is and identifying the essential characteristics of school community—commitment, cooperation, and the presence of a common goal. This gives some focus and direction to the kind of communal relationships that are important within the school.

The Boundaries of School Community

The boundaries of school community are not easy to identify. Communities are not fixed, static units. They are fluid, changing groups of people bound together through a variety of different relationships. Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other school staff are all part of a school community. They also may be part of other political, social, religious, and vocational communities.

Communities may overlap. What happens in one community may affect another. For example, certain religious and political communities have affected everything from school textbook selection to what books are on the shelves in school libraries. The point is that communities are not usually isolated or unchanging.

Although communities may interact with one another, each has a distinct identity. Thomas J. Sergiovanni (1994) notes, "Community can help teachers and students be transformed from a collection of 'I's' to a collective we, thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging, and place."

The boundaries of school community are to a large extent determined by the setting—the school. The people who work and learn in the school environment are all potential members. For the purposes of this Bulletin, however, use of the term *school community* is confined to the relationships of commitment and cooperation among adults and students involved in school routines on a daily basis. This restrictive use of the term still includes parents and district administrators who actively involve themselves in daily processes of instruction.

Limiting the parameters of the term *school community* is not meant to minimize the importance of others who do not meet the criteria mentioned above. Decisions made by outsiders who affect the school community are indeed important, but they are beyond the scope of this Bulletin. Narrowing the definition of school community in this way allows us to focus attention on the relationships within the school and helps practitioners understand how administrative and educational choices influence their daily lives.

School Community and a Sense of Place

"It is impossible to divorce the question of what we do from the question of where we are—or rather, where we think we are," writes Wendell Berry (1977). "What we conceive to be our nest, and where we think it is, are therefore questions of great importance."

School community, then, involves more than social relationships. It is embedded in a sense of place as well as in social bonds. As part of their sense of place, members of the school community must view the school as a setting for social interaction.

Thus, the defining characteristics of school community are found in social bonds of cooperation and commitment, a common sense of purpose, and a sense of place. These features provide a framework for our discussion. They also intimate how school communities function and indicate areas where practitioners might consider making policy changes.

The Power of Social Bonds To Govern Behavior

We tend to think of organizations as bureaucratic and impersonal, and professional relationships as being rooted in contracts and obligations.

Communal relationships, by contrast, are perceived as being built on commitment and concern.

Understanding community as distinct from a collection of individuals is key. The fabric of community is woven from social bonds among caring individuals. As Sergiovanni (1994) notes, "Bonding and binding are the defining characteristics of schools as communities." The metaphorical vision of community congurs up an image of people who are bonded together working toward a common goal. These people are not only concerned with achieving a goal but with the welfare of the people involved and the means used to achieve the desired end.

Leaders contemplating change and reform should consider how applying the school-as-community metaphor to our educational system would radically alter our vision of educational governance and organization. In a school community there is less reliance on external control for direction; such communities are governed primarily by norms, values, purpose, and collegiality. The presence of community partially replaces a formal system of supervision and management. As Sergiovanni explains, "Changing the metaphor for the school from organization to community changes what is true about how schools should be organized and run, about what motivates teachers and students, and about what leadership is, and how it should be practiced."

Community versus Society

In contrast to a community, a *society* is defined by more impersonal relationships (Sergiovanni). Social bonds, so important in communities, are replaced with contractual ties. An efficient society encourages people to navigate their way through a series of bureaucratic rules and procedures to reach a desired outcome. Attachments among people are more contrived, forged with less genuine concern for others, and generally of a more secular than sacred nature.

As the modern world drifts further and further away from a true concept of community, "meaning and significance in life becomes more difficult to find" (Sergiovanni). Moving away from communal relationships and toward more societal obligations has cultural consequences, which may emerge as feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection. Individuals aspire to be successful in a cultural milieu that demands impersonal, competitive interactions.

The implications for school leaders are readily apparent.

The modern world brings more complex problems into the school setting. Outside of the school there seems to be less opportunity to participate in community relationships. Family structures are often weak or nonex-

istent, and a variety of social organizations are either overloaded or ill-equipped to deal with the problems associated with today's youth.

Principals able to reverse this trend can create an affirming, optimistic environment for students and teachers. Relationships move away from contractual bonds and obligations to more genuine bonds of concern and consideration for others. This is not to suggest that all societal influences should be discounted or abandoned. Rather, the lack of community in our modern lives is so prevalent that the school has become a powerful haven for reconnecting the disenfranchised.

Chapter 2 looks at what research says about the importance of school community. The studies examined build a strong case for the pursuit of more communally oriented organizations.

Chapter 2

Why Is School Community Important?

Community is a concept educators and practitioners like to associate with schools. Schools with a strong sense of community are perceived to be successful. Perhaps this is true because the word c*ommunity* creates an image of parents, principals, and teachers working together toward a common goal. But does community-building in schools encourage sound academic development? Research suggests that it does.

This chapter focuses on the importance of strong school communities. Students and teachers are more motivated and more productive in environments where social bonds are emphasized over bureaucracies.

Effects of School Community on Students

Students benefit from schools with an ethic of caring. Research in the field suggests that principals can develop this ethic institutionally by focusing on community-building.

Dropping Out

In many high schools located in major cities, fewer than half of the students graduate. Studies by University of Chicago researchers reveal some of the causes of this disturbing trend (Anthony S. Bryk and Yeow Meng Thum 1989, Bryk and Mary Erina Driscoll 1988). Their research builds on the work of James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer (1987), who hypothesized that Catholic schools provide a more communal environment for students than public schools. According to Coleman and Hoffer, "Functional communities organized around parish churches bring parents and students together...

thereby creating a form of social capital that facilitates the work of the school."

Like Coleman and Hoffer's work, the research of Bryk, Thum, and Driscoll evaluated some of the differences between Catholic and public schools. Their investigations focused on some of the problems associated with absenteeism and dropping out.

Bryk and Thum acknowledge that student alienation results in large part from socioeconomic forces beyond the scope of their research. "Nevertheless," they contend, "there is considerable evidence that the broad cultural changes of the past two decades have had a direct effect on the organization of contemporary schools, and these changes in turn have had a major impact on student engagement."

They surveyed 4,450 high school sophomores from a cross-section of 83 Catholic and 94 public schools. The surveys addressed a number of school and social variables in the following areas: perceived teacher quality, academic rigor, disciplinary climate, curricular differentiation and commonality, and social and academic background. When the researchers compared the data gathered from the Catholic and public schools, they found support for the claim that disadvantaged or at-risk youth benefit from "a committed faculty, an orderly environment, and a school emphasis on academic pursuits." These factors were "associated with lower probability of dropping out for such youth," according to Bryk and Thum.

The two researchers suggest that whether the school is Catholic or public, the organizational environment is particularly effective in "smaller high schools where there are substantial opportunities for informal adult-student interactions." In addition, Bryk and Driscoll identify several other features that are associated with a communal atmosphere in schools:

- SES and ethnic homogeneity
- strong parent-teacher relations
- academic choice
- strong administrative leadership

A shared sense of purpose and a commitment to community raise engagement among both students and teachers. Conversely, in schools characterized by minimal direction, isolated faculty, and a chaotic atmosphere, at-risk youth are more likely to drop out. These studies suggest that the community within the school not only influences how students perceive school but also affects whether they choose to remain in school.

Academic Success

Many variables, from instructional styles to students' home environ-

ment, can affect student academic performance. For this reason, Gary G. Wehlage and colleagues (1989) drew from a variety of sources when they collected data on school community and its effect on academic performance and attendance.

The following criteria were used to select schools for the study: (1) The schools should be a subset of a larger at-risk population, (2) the schools should provide a broad range of age groups, (3) innovative program should be offered, (4) all schools should have some evidence of their effectiveness, (5) schools must have the potential to serve as role models for other districts, and (6) school sites must be willing to accept the presence of researchers and provide assessment data (Wehlage and others 1989).

Twenty schools participated in the study, which used both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods. The qualitative component compared and analyzed selected school experiences. Researchers observed classrooms, teachers' meetings, informal student-teacher interactions, formal and informal interviews, and peer-group interactions. Upon completion of the general observations, a case study was written for each school.

Two quantitative instruments were used in the study. The first, the Wisconsin Youth Survey, measured school interventions on at-risk student populations. The survey, administered to 270 high school sophomores in a pre/post-test design, consists of 80 questions. Nine pertain to student demographics and the rest measure attitudes and beliefs in the areas of social bonding to peers, social bonding to school, academic self-concept, negative teacher behavior, perception of opportunity, acceptance of conventional roles, locus of control, self-esteem, and sociocentric reasoning.

The second instrument, Degrees of Reading Power, assessed students' reading level. The test presented students with passages that varied in difficulty and posed questions to ascertain comprehension of the material.

With their holistic approach to research, Wehlage and colleagues documented the importance of building community within the school. Comparative data in seven of the fourteen programs that showed high support of caring teachers and a renewed sense of connection to the school by students revealed substantial increases in student GPA. The increase in GPAs at these schools was correlated with teacher, student, and staff bonds, that is, with community strength.

Besides quantitative support, Wehlage and others also provide qualitative evidence of the importance of school community. Kelly, a student at Sierra Mountain High School in Grass Valley, California, "described her teachers as 'sisters and brothers' and said that the absence of this closeness had interfered with her learning at a previous high school." Rickie, a student from Media Academy in Oakland, California, echoed Kelly's sentiments on school community. Rickie admitted not liking junior high, but when he came

to the academy, a school with a strong sense of community, he felt quite different about school. "I had never experienced this before where the teachers are close and encourage me. I was just a C+/B- student, but now I'm an A/B student."

Wehlage and colleagues note that the schools that positively affect student attitudes and academic performance share several characteristics: (1) Teachers have assumed larger roles of counselor, confidante, and friend to students, staff, and each other; (2) course content is more closely tied with the needs of the student; (3) greater emphasis is placed on hands-on, experiential learning; (4) more attention is paid to the needs and concerns of each student; and (5) teachers work together to govern the school and make critical decisions about curriculum and school policy.

Self-Esteem

In addition to academic success, Wehlage and associates also report increases in student self-esteem at schools with a strong sense of community. Responses to the Wisconsin Youth Survey indicated that student self-esteem was highest in schools with high levels of social bonding between teachers and students and among students themselves. "Being part of a collective educational enterprise," the researchers conclude, "encourages not only better attendance and cooperation, it also leads them to experience an increased sense of worth and competence."

Continuing Education

Students who were more confident and perceived more opportunities for themselves were also more likely to extend their education, Wehlage and his colleagues found. The schools that focused on community expanded students' perceptions of what they were capable of achieving. That is, school community, as expressed in social bonds with others and experiential instruction, made students more interested in pursuing the next level of schooling. Junior high schoolers were more likely to enroll in high school, and high school students were more likely to enroll in college. Not only were student dropout rates lower, but the at-risk students grew more enthusiastic about new educational opportunities.

Another recent study supports the above findings. After analyzing 11,200 student surveys from 820 schools, Valerie E. Lee and Julia B. Smith (1994) concluded that "in a communal school the educational focus for students and teachers seems clearer to those who experience it, and the increased opportunity for sustained contact in groups may heighten the commitment of both teachers and students to succeed." Anthony S. Bryk

(1994) concurs with Lee and Smith's findings. In fact, Bryk states:

> These findings complement and extend a now-large body of research evidence that smaller schools are more productive work places for both adults and students. In these more intimate environments, teachers are more likely to report greater satisfaction with their work, higher levels of morale and greater commitment. Problems of student misconduct, class cutting, absenteeism and dropping out are all less prevalent. We also know that student achievement tends to be more inequitably distributed in bigger schools.

Resiliency in Youth

According to Andrew Duncan (1994), social bonds play an important role in building resilient behavior in children. Resilient children are socially competent and have problem-solving skills. These and other skills provide children with a sense of personal autonomy and purpose. Duncan notes a number of factors that contribute to the development of resiliency:

- *Caring and support:* May be provided by a caring parent, a confident and positive teacher, supportive and caring peers, or social links with the community.
- *High expectations:* Positive parental attitudes, high academic and behavior expectations at school, and clear community expectations and values.
- *Active participation:* Responsibilities at home, involvement in school and extracurricular activities, and opportunities for participation in useful tasks in the community.

Any community that creates shared understandings about moral direction and appropriate behavior promotes an unwritten sense of expectations. This "sense," according to Ianni (1993), encourages the development of character in young people. "It is the pattern of intracommunity, institutional relationships that establishes youth character."

Effects of School Community on Teachers

Not only students, but also teachers benefit from the experience of community in schools.

Teacher and Student Commitment

Research by William A. Firestone and Sheila Rosenblum (1988) underscores the importance of committed, honest relationships between teachers and students. The level of commitment directly affects the health

and strength of a school's community, according to Firestone and Rosenblum.

Firestone and Rosenblum collected data from district offices and high schools in two different cities. The superintendent in each city was asked to choose two high schools with similar student bodies, one of which had a history of administrative problems. The schools were midsized; demographically, students were primarily from low-income families and had minority status.

Interviewers asked a variety of questions related to school factors, student commitment, and teacher commitment. The following are examples of the questions:

- What kind of things make teachers/students think about leaving this school?
- What kind of things make them think about staying?
- What things make you feel that you have had a good day in this school?
- What things make you feel you have had a bad day?

The results of Firestone and Rosenblum's study suggest that "in some schools a vicious cycle operates whereby teacher alienation contributes to student alienation and vice versa." According to Firestone and Rosenblum, five factors can help reduce alienation: (1) a sense among teachers and students that they are respected by administrators, (2) the exchange of perspectives among students and teachers, (3) administrative support, (4) high teacher expectations of student success, and (5) relevant instructional material.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Bryk and Driscoll's comparative study of Catholic and public schools revealed some interesting findings about teacher job satisfaction. Teachers and principals at 315 of the 357 schools involved in their original study were given questionnaires from the Administrator and Teacher Survey (ATS), which provides information on attitudes of school personnel. Questions covered a wide range of issues, including expectations about student achievement and behavior, perceptions of specific school policies, administrators' views of school goals, and working conditions.

Bryk and Driscoll found that teachers enjoy their work in schools with a strong sense of community. After correcting for other variables, such as positive lifestyles and attitudes, Bryk and Driscoll found that teacher job satisfaction was five times greater in schools with a supportive community. Moreover, the researchers noted that the effect of school community was five times larger than any other school variable.

Staff Morale

Not only was teacher job satisfaction greater, staff morale also increased in schools with a strong sense of community. Bryk and Driscoll reported that the effects of school community were "three times larger than for any other school variable." The results point to the need for strong cohesion among teachers, principals, and students. In an environment where people care about each other and are free from authoritative demands, staff morale is significantly higher.

Teacher Absenteeism

Bryk and Driscoll also noted that teacher absenteeism was lower in communal schools. Teachers reported for work more often in schools with effective leadership and strong social bonds between staff and students, though the most important factor was school size. Smaller schools had better attendance rates for both teachers and students. "This," the authors state, "provides further evidence that increasing size acts to diminish a sense of community within schools and the positive consequences attendant to this organizational form."

Creating smaller schools or smaller units within the school; reaffirming formal and informal bonds among teachers, staff, and students; and providing strong leadership all lead to more communal organizations. As Bryk and Driscoll emphasize, "The sheer magnitude of these empirical findings provides reason to affirm that the community measure is tapping an important organizational reality."

Evidence from this and other studies referred to in this chapter indicates that school community is important for both individual effectiveness and school effectiveness. Students work harder, attend school more often, and have stronger academic skills in schools with strong communities. And student violence decreases in communal organizations.

Likewise, teachers work harder and enjoy their work more in an environment that puts social bonds above individual success. They have lower rates of absenteeism and higher levels of dedication and commitment to educating students. School community promotes better education and better administration and positively affects school culture.

While research indicates the importance of school community, communal organizations are not easily created. The process takes time and often involves restructuring. Chapter 3 explores what a successful school community might look like. Three case studies give practitioners some direction and perspective in building strong school communities.

Chapter 3

School Community: Three Case Studies

As part of a nationwide study of school restructuring, the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools looked at community-building in several schools. Three schools offer particularly noteworthy examples of the challenges to building professional communities. This chapter, drawing from a report* by Leon Lynn (1994), presents profiles of those three schools—Southern Elementary School, Northwest Middle School, and Western High School. All three illustrate a strong sense of school community. Still, some reforms were more effective than others. The case studies offer practitioners a glimpse of some of the ways school community can be cultivated or diminished.

Researchers from the center spent "thirty person days" at each school conducting observations, administering surveys, and interviewing students, teachers, and administrators. School names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Southern Elementary School

Southern Elementary is located in a large working-class neighborhood. The school serves 988 students from prekindergarten through fifth grade and maintains a faculty of 75 teachers, 18 of which are certified in bilingual education. The student population is 83 percent Hispanic, 12 percent white, 4 percent Asian, and 1 percent African-American.

In 1986, the district mandated the creation of school-based improvement teams in its schools. Teams of teachers, parents, and administrators were assembled to enhance student engagement.

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*The following summary of findings is published with the permission of Leon Lynn, who reviewed it for accuracy.

Test scores in reading were far below the national average, and district representatives believed that a more supportive school community would increase student performance.

As part of the change process, the district hired a new principal. "The new principal was a strong believer in making schools into nurturing, inclusive places" (Lynn 1994). Her assignment, as she put it, was to "fix the problem and get Southern up to speed." She did this by encouraging interdependence among teachers and providing strong administrative support for new classroom techniques and ideas.

After intensive research, the school-improvement teams embraced the Accelerated Schools model developed by Henry Levin of Stanford University. The model, which focuses on at-risk populations, prompted two major changes in educational practice at Southern: (1) All students were placed in age-appropriate grade levels, as opposed to remedial classes; and (2) all students, regardless of background, were expected to achieve the same level of academic excellence.

Three years after the Accelerated Schools model was implemented, reading scores rose above the national average. However, according to teachers and staff, the development of a strong school community was instrumental in enabling the academic model to succeed. Based on surveys conducted by the center, teachers at Southern Elementary felt they were part of an active, thriving professional community. According to the survey:

- 89 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have influence on the decisions in the school which directly affect me."
- 82 percent of teachers disagreed strongly with the statement "Many of the students are not capable of learning the material I am supposed to teach them."
- At least 90 percent of the teachers said they felt supported by the administration and felt safe to voice concerns. They said they were respected by their colleagues and could count on them.
- Nearly 75 percent of the teachers said staff development programs helped them acquire important new knowledge and skills.

Southern's commitment to professional community-building benefitted students. Class participation increased, as did student interest in classroom instruction. Lynn explains, "Researchers reported hearing students take part in substantive conversations in classes, and saw numerous examples of students critically evaluating complex ideas."

It is difficult to pinpoint specific changes that fostered a sense of community. Improvement teams; a strong principal; teacher commitment to student learning; a willingness by administrators to experiment; committee meetings; inservice opportunities for professional development; parent

involvement; and constant dialogue among teachers, students, and staff were all part of the equation. The school's community was successful largely because people worked to make it succeed and leaders were not afraid to implement significant changes.

School restructuring went hand-in-hand with building a strong school community at Southern. Changes were made with the awareness that cooperative decision-making and a shared vision can promote cohesion. Southern is a noteworthy example of how school community can boost morale and academic success. While the change process was difficult, use of school-improvement teams and ample opportunities for professional development established a better learning environment for teachers, staff, and students.

Northwest Middle School

Northwest Middle School is located in a midsized city in the Northwest. With 800 students in sixth through eighth grades, the school employs 45 full-time faculty members. Its student population is 90 percent white, 3 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 percent African-American, 2 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Native-American/Alaskan-Native.

Unlike Southern Elementary School, Northwest Middle School focused on enlarging the scope of choice among members of the school community. The school granted a certain amount of autonomy to both teachers and students. In the 1970s, it implemented an "all elective" structure that allowed teachers to design and teach classes they thought were important. In turn, students were allowed to select classes they wanted to take. The emphasis was on teacher and student autonomy in decision-making.

The early- and mid-eighties brought a wave of supplemental reforms to the school. A new principal guided changes in the areas of class scheduling and school governance. These reforms brought minor changes, but, as Lynn reports, "It is the 'choice system' that continues to define Northwest culture."

The freedom and autonomy given to staff and students have been positive in many respects, but in terms of building a strong school community, "free choice" has also raised some problems. The range of choices has left some students and parents confused about what choices parents should make to ensure their child receives an appropriate education.

In addition, there are no clear criteria to assess student outcomes, and the process lacks accountability. As one parent noted, "My daughter doesn't know the times tables." "What bothers me," he continued, "is that nobody here knows that she doesn't know it. There's no standard that gives the content knowledge and the intellectual processes that children need to know."

The emphasis on autonomy also has distorted the faculty's shared sense of direction. When asked by researchers about the unifying purpose of the school, most gave vague responses. "Going forward" and "having the same end result in mind" were the most common answers. Many teachers appeared to be functioning independently, unaware of or unconcerned about the educational goals of other teachers and the school.

Perhaps most disturbing was the lack of reflective dialogue at Northwest. Teachers talked to one another, but the dialogue lacked reflection, scrutiny, and reevaluation of educational programs. Conversations happened in small, isolated pockets. The choice system promoted separateness, which was a byproduct of teachers' competing for student enrollment. Teachers found a need to keep their classes unique and the content somewhat confidential as a way of attracting students.

As a result of this isolation, teachers in the school developed very divergent views of curriculum. While some supported cooperative forms of education, others embraced more teacher-centered types of instruction. Although the autonomy promoted educational diversity, the school lacked a sense of direction and focus. Northwest staff lacked a cohesive vision of what students should learn and what educational goals were most important.

The experience of Northwest Middle School illustrates that while educational choice can enhance diversity in instructional content and teaching methods, too many choices can threaten relational bonds and school community. Northwest Middle School attempted to use choice as a vehicle for bringing parents, teachers, and staff together. Unfortunately, unlimited choice and decision-making in both curriculum development and class scheduling at times led to an environment that isolated participants.

"Despite these problems," Lynn notes, "Northwest is by all accounts a successful school with a strong professional community." This can be attributed to a number of different factors. Lynn points out that "teachers push themselves to serve students because they feel a high level of ownership of the school." They have a strong sense of collective and individual power in decision-making. Strong administrative support is also a key factor in the success of Northwest's professional community. The principal shows "a true commitment to letting teachers make decisions for themselves."

The evidence provided in Lynn's report reminds practitioners to blend individual choice with a cooperative and directive vision. Choice is only beneficial in creating strong school communities when the choices have some direction. Administrators must provide a framework and vision that guides the kinds of choices made available to students, teachers, and staff. At the same time, Northwest also illustrates the power of choice and personal autonomy in creating a sense of ownership. Both are important to a successful school community.

Western High School

Western High School is in a midsized city with a metropolitan area of more than 1.3 million people. Enrollment is 2,300 and the student body is composed of a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds (36 percent white, 24 percent Asian, 17 percent African-American, 12 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Filipino, and 1 percent Native-American). More than 23 languages are represented within the student body.

With an unusually diverse student population, Western set out to create a strong learning community. The task was overseen by a group of principal-appointed teachers, students, and parents. Their job was to design and create a mission statement that would help shape the formal structure of schooling at Western. The final statement embraced a "school-wide commitment to heterogeneous grouping and multicultural education." The group also recommended a focus on high academic standards. Members of the group agreed that high expectations tend to produce high student outcomes.

At the instructional level, the commitment to community-building was carried out by creating "house programs." The idea was to divide the large population into smaller units of 150 or fewer students so that students would receive more personalized attention and teachers would be able to work with a stable student population.

The house program worked well. "Within the house structure," Lynn reports, "teachers found new opportunities to meet with their colleagues and compare points of view." In addition, the new structure helped teachers to develop more meaningful and longer lasting relationships with students.

Western also implemented several strategies to encourage teacher collaboration. The first was a mentor program for new teachers. The goal of this program was to give new teachers a chance to learn from more experienced colleagues. New teachers were paired according their area of interest or subject-area specialty. The members of the pairs were expected to communicate regularly, and they were given two days off per year to coordinate curriculum. Many teachers who participated in this program said it gave them valuable contact with other teachers.

The second strategy used to foster collaboration was the formation of formal committees. Committees were seen as tools for both collaboration and administrative decision-making. Most committees were comprised of teachers and other staff members. These groups worked on everything from employing an effective-schools model on campus to specific instructional concerns. The committees were designed to bring teachers and other staff members together to increase school unity.

The third collaborative strategy was to offer teachers more time for professional development. Western conducted four half-day seminars each

year, focusing on a variety of subjects that the developmental committees found important. These seminars focused on improving the school community in areas ranging from school culture and climate to administrative decision-making. Most teachers who participated said that they were very satisfied with the seminars.

Not all teachers, however, found the collaborative strategies effective. Many teachers liked the idea of having committees and governance activities, but they felt the time commitment was too great. Also, many committee meetings followed a rigid format that some teachers believed discouraged creativity and openness. Still, most agreed that the collaborative changes improved the school's sense of community.

Western offers practitioners a working model of a successful school community. By using house programs, a committee-generated mission statement, shared decision-making, and more professional development, Western was able to build a communal organization that involved members more fully in the life of the school.

These case studies serve to make administrators aware of practices that are prevalent in successful school communities. Small schools or small units within larger schools, directed choices, collaborative decisions and visions for change, teams and committees, a willingness to experiment, and professional-development opportunities are just a few elements that can be catalysts for community-building. Schools that adopt these practices will likely be more successful in establishing a lasting, successful community of learners.

Still, the case studies mentioned here only provide a thumbnail sketch of what successful school communities may look like. To flesh this out, chapter 4 outlines specific reforms practitioners might consider in building a strong community within the school.

Chapter 4

Building Caring Communities Through Leadership

Different leaders encourage the development of different values, and school cultures grow in part from the traditions and rituals principals feature in their daily routines. Likewise, caring communities often emerge from charismatic and concerned leaders. This chapter profiles two leaders who make fostering school community a top priority. Each principal has developed innovative strategies to make his school a caring environment.

Don Jackson, Whiteaker Elementary School

Don Jackson knows the importance of caring communities. He is the principal of Whiteaker Elementary School in Eugene, Oregon. Whiteaker's student population comes from predominantly low-income families and tough neighborhoods. Of the 225 students at Whiteaker, 97 percent are living in families with incomes below the U.S. federal poverty level. For many students, Whiteaker is a haven from neighborhoods filled with drugs and violence.

With warm blue trim, pictures on the walls, friendly staff, and a principal's door that is always open, Whiteaker feels more like a home than a school. Zach and Man, two third graders, pop into Jackson's office for a visit. They have learned to greet visitors with firm handshakes and a look straight in the eye. Don says, "The important thing is not what is real, but what is perceived. If they appear confident and successful, they will be."

This attitude seems to permeate Whiteaker. Teachers and staff seem genuinely concerned about students, and daily programs are imbued with a spirit that enhances motivation, morale, and community. Jackson has built a "can-do attitude" into the school's climate and culture, and his creative community-building ideas reflect this attitude.

Dolphins to Bikes

Dolphins line the walls of Whiteaker Elementary School. Drawn by students, no one dolphin looks the same. A long, curved nose, green eyes, a fin that waves, and a tail that walks—each has a distinct artistic flair.

Dolphins are the adopted school mascots at Whiteaker. They symbolize intelligence and friendship. As Jackson explains, "Dolphins never hurt anybody, and the kids will tell you that."

Jackson, along with teachers and staff, uses dolphins as a thematic symbol to teach values and motivate kids.

The creativity behind the dolphin program starts with innovative leadership. Jackson's idea was to reward good behavior and sound academics with dolphin awards that put students in contention for weekly drawings, in which the prize is a bicycle.

At Whiteaker, teachers and other staff members carry dolphin slips. These slips, square pieces of paper stamped with a small dolphin, are given to students for good behavior or academic achievement. Teachers and staff use their own discretion in deciding when to issue slips. Anywhere, anytime, students are eligible to receive dolphin awards. After receiving an award slip, students write their name on the back of it and put the slip into a large basket, from which the weekly drawing is made.

The dolphin program also includes parents and other community members. Jackson convinced people in the Whiteaker community to find and donate old bikes to the school. With bikes in hand, Jackson persuaded a local bike shop to repair and renovate them. The bikes were then returned to the schools shiny and ready to ride.

A bike and basket full of dolphin slips come together each week at Whiteaker Elementary's morning breakfast assembly. Jackson is the master of ceremonies. He and other teachers tell stories and celebrate student success. Then, at the end of the assembly, one name is drawn from the basket of dolphin slips, and the winner runs up to receive a new bike.

The program costs the school nothing, but the impact on kids is invaluable. The dolphin slips help kids feel like they can be successful. The program also creates unity among students, who are all trying to win bikes. Teachers and other staff members are equally excited by the kids' enthusiasm for the program. Don Jackson's creative leadership and community involvement have made this program an overwhelming success.

Purple Power

"I'm a big guy," said Jackson; "just my physical size can be intimidating to some of these kids. So I have to find ways to break down barriers and get the kids to notice me." Don starts with what he calls "purple power."

"For years I've worn purple," he said, "even before I was a principal. I just added to the idea." Now, Don wears some purple every day. "If they catch me without purple," he boasted, "they get $250."

The idea does more than offer students a monetary incentive. When the kids see Jackson, they examine him closely. They forget his potentially intimidating physical size and bushy beard, and they search for purple clothing. Purple power fosters communication. "When the kids see me," Jackson explained, "they don't see some old guy. They're thinking, 'Hey, does this guy have purple on?' It keeps conversations going and kids interested."

Purple power and dolphins to bikes are just two of many creative leadership strategies that Jackson uses to involve kids and to let them know he cares. His ideas are simple yet profound. By using simple and creative leadership strategies, Don Jackson has created a caring community at Whiteaker Elementary.

Bob Anderson, North Eugene High School

The stroll down to Bob Anderson's office feels like a relaxing walk around an inviting neighborhood. Anderson waves to staff, stops and talks to students, and provides a running commentary on the life and history of North Eugene High School. Pointing to a student's poetry displayed in the front hall, "That kid," Jackson says, "probably wouldn't stop and talk to us, but look at that talent." We stop for a moment and read the student's poetry. The lines reveal a genuine artistic talent. Anderson knows his kids and boasts their accomplishments like a proud father. "I can't think of a job I'd rather do. There is so much creative energy here, and the kids keep me on my toes."

North Eugene High has about 1,000 students. One quarter of those students come from low-income families. The building is old and has long hallways, but the atmosphere is upbeat and friendly. North Eugene High School is the kind of place that is fun to visit.

Anderson's leadership style is tough to categorize. The job seems to come so easy to him. "I have good people," he said modestly. But good people also need a clear direction, and Anderson provides that by modeling communication styles and building consensus. He is a leader with patience and a strong sense of direction.

He says communities are built through respect. "Respect all kids, don't put them down, keep office doors open, and if you're having a problem, let's talk. That's how I let kids know that I care." He puts these words into action in a variety of ways.

Art as Community

Student artwork lines the halls of North Eugene High School. Self-portraits, animals, cars, team logos, nature, and abstract paintings all have a place in the school's corridors and display cases. Works on exhibition also include poetry, student essays, sculpture, and photography. "The art," says Anderson, "bonds kids together. It makes teachers, staff, and other students appreciate the unique talents of kids who would normally be just another face in the crowd."

Mary Gay Holland, the art teacher, makes many of the student projects possible. Her room is filled with sculptures, drawings, poetry, pictures, half-finished paintings, and collages. "Surround yourself with talented people," Anderson says with a humble smile, "and there's not much to do."

The student art at North Eugene is more than just pictures on a wall. The works are expressions of emotion, opinion, and talent. Visitors who stroll down the halls of North Eugene will find it hard to ignore this artistry. The displays make anyone who enters the building feel part of something bigger. They instill a sense of belonging and community for visitors, and they do the same for those who work and attend North Eugene High.

Staff Biographies

Among the composite pictures from past graduates and art from students is a wall devoted to pictures and personal histories of teachers and staff. Baby, high school yearbook, and family pictures are included with personal biographies of each person. The wall gives a personal dimension to the people who work and teach at North Eugene. It also gives the school community some depth and history. The teachers and staff appear as real people with families and lives outside of the school.

This is an important message. Students feel less social distance between them and their teachers because the pictures and biographies reveal the differences and similarities in their lifestyles. The biographies include teachers and staff as part of the school community, and make it easy for them to be seen more than just professionals doing a job. They are mothers and fathers that once attended high school. They are pet owners, vacationers, and hobbyists. They are not so different from the students they teach.

The biographies provide a simple message that builds community. Students feel more comfortable and open with people they know and trust. The biographies open the staff up to students and provide an important step in creating trust. Simply put, the biographies say, "I care."

Natural Helpers

Anderson also makes use of a nationwide program called Natural Helpers. The program targets at-risk kids and uses peer counseling to motivate them socially and academically.

At North Eugene, the program starts with a counselor, nurse, and teacher. Students with attendance, academic, drug, alcohol and behavior problems are referred to this group. Surveys are then completed by the student and staff to identify problem areas and potential peer counselors. After the surveys are reviewed, the at-risk students are paired with peer counselors. They meet with these counselors once or twice a week and discuss ways to solve current problems.

Anderson said this program has been instrumental in creating a "pervasive caring environment. The kids actually feel like someone their age cares about them. The counseling isn't just left to adults who may be out of touch with these kids' real problems."

Innovative Leadership

Bob Anderson and Don Jackson are two extremely successful leaders who have worked hard to build caring communities in their schools.

Jackson has a flair for creative and flamboyant strategies that excite young kids. Anderson has a more subtle approach to building consensus among staff and modeling behavior. Both leaders are great communicators, storytellers, and visionaries. They are both accessible to students and truly concerned for all those who work in and attend their schools.

Anderson concisely expressed his feeling about school community when he said, "Cultures reinforce themselves. The one thing that must come out of that process is a general caring for kids."

Chapter 5

Making Changes That Promote School Community

This chapter offers some practical suggestions for building strong bonds of solidarity in the school community. The options range from encouraging positive values to providing adequate support for teachers and students, and reinvigorating the school environment. Reforms should be adapted to each school's context. "In this change process," Raymond L. Calabrese (1994) notes, "collaboration replaces competition; consensus replaces separation; inter-dependence replaces independence; connection replaces fragmentation; and dialogue replaces duolog." Promoting a strong sense of community requires flexible leadership rooted in a consistent set of values.

Developing Values That Foster School Community

A strong school community shares a set of deeply rooted values. Strong leadership is necessary to ensure that particular values are clearly communicated, but the path a school follows depends on the type of community envisioned.

Some communities flourish within a context of competition, while others are inspired by collaboration. The values important to a school community must be defined through a process that encourages participation. Although the values that are stressed most heavily may vary from school to school, Calabrese suggests that "all communities would benefit from incorporating certain values." Calabrese identifies the core values described below as important for building a strong school community.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity involves interdependence and implies action. In reciprocal relationships, each party acts in the other's best interest. In practice, reciprocity in a school setting might translate into principals' giving teachers more preparation time, offering more opportunities for professional development, and encouraging new instructional techniques. In exchange, teachers might assume some extra duties and play a larger role in student discipline.

Reciprocity starts when members of the school community recognize organizational needs and feel empowered to address them. Reciprocity requires principals to lead by example and to express their own needs as well as be attuned to the needs of others.

Compassion

Compassion is closely related to reciprocity. Members of a compassionate community are concerned about the needs of others. As Calabrese explains, "We are compassionate in a community when we recognize that human needs precede organizational needs."

How is compassion communicated in a school setting? Principals can take time to listen and hear parent, teacher, and student concerns. Policies can be enacted that have consideration of others as the primary focus. Members of the community can be taught to appreciate that people's lives extend beyond the walls of the school. The principal's job is to express to others both in word and deed the importance of living and working in a compassionate school community.

Acceptance

To be compassionate, one first must practice acceptance. "Acceptance," Calabrese suggests, "requires that we expand our view of the world to include others." People who possess acceptance embrace differences and let go of preconceived notions and stereotypes.

Principals can foster a community of acceptance by being inclusive. Consider all opinions and views, select staff that are accepting of others, and recognize that diversity can enrich community.

Honesty

Honesty should be the foundation for relationships in a strong school community. Principals, teachers, and students need to recognize the importance of supporting open communication. Community members must feel free to express what they believe to be true. They a'so must act with virtue and integrity.

Principals can best lead by example. Leaders who express their opinion with sincerity and work with integrity create an honest environment. In this type of community, members are more likely to recognize the biases, blind spots, and filters that color their views.

Commitment

A willingness "to share our talents, time, and energy to build those around us, and foster the school's goals" are all involved in building commitment, states Calabrese. But without commitment, teachers, principals, and students are just going through the motions of education.

Principals can foster commitment in a number of ways, including the following:

- Showing commitment to teachers by giving them credit for new programs and ideas
- Using staff meetings as a time to recognize people who have put extra time and effort into the school community
- Encouraging students to design and take part in school community activities, including assemblies, school pride weeks, awards for excellence in academics, and extracurricular activities, and giving them input in determining new school policies
- Pushing all members of the community to search for common ground, whether in conflict or in shared decision-making

Equality

People who value equality give fair representation to all. There are no special-interest groups. Educators create a sense of equality by having faith that others can succeed. A person's title is not as important as the quality of their work and the substance of their character. A community treats all members equally.

Justice

A just community is committed to fairness for all people. Organizational members should not be excluded because their ideas are abrasive or unpopular. If a community is just, the members will be allowed to express criticism.

To promote justice, principals must be flexible and open. "Backroom deals" cannot become the norm of policy implementation. Likewise, teachers should not be disciplined for voicing views critical of the school leadership. Principals should encourage an atmosphere in which members feel free

to offer constructive criticism. School leaders should also assure teachers that criticism will not be viewed as a personal attack but instead regarded as a necessary step in the process of reaching consensus.

By keeping these values in mind, school leaders will be better prepared to build healthy communities.

Preventing Misunderstanding

The motivation behind adopting a set of values that promotes community in the school must be clearly communicated. Otherwise, the process may be confused with imposing moral education on members of the school community. Phrases like "moral direction," "instilling important values," and "appropriate ethical behavior" may alarm parents, teachers, and other community members. For good reason, some may question the intent of proposed changes. At the root of their concerns is the question "Whose values should be taught?"

Etzioni recommends "starting with the myriad values we all share"—values important to all members of the community. Where can consensus be reached? Open communication and shared input allows parents, teachers, students, and staff to find some common ground. Ultimately, principals may be faced with some difficult and unpopular decisions. People will not always agree, but offering all community members a voice paves the way for compromise and commonality.

Building Community Through School Culture

There is a relationship between school culture and community-building. School culture consists of the norms, values, beliefs, traditions, rituals, and myths that are acknowledged in varying degrees by members of the school community (Stolp and Smith 1995). The school culture establishes deep ties and symbolic relationships that define bonds of commitment. Schools with strong cultures are more likely to have members who share a concern for the welfare of others and the quality of education. That is, schools with strong cultures are more likely to have caring communities.

Several strategies that Stolp and Smith recommend to enhance school culture also encourage strong school communities:

- *Establishing a Shared Vision*—Building a concerned community requires not only some common values and a unified direction among school members, but also individual ownership of ideas. Students, teachers, and staff should participate in the process of creating a vision of "what their school could be." This process

includes creating a system of shared responsibility for negotiating the types of values, norms, and beliefs that are important to the school community.

- *Encouraging Reflection and Dialogue*—As administrators work toward building a shared vision, they should seriously consider the opinions of others. Some important lessons can be gained through dialogue with staff members. The seeds of a caring community are often evident in the "daily talk" of staff members. Leaders who are attentive to such dialogue will learn some important lessons about their school's community.
- *Selecting Compatible Staff*—A challenging but important task for school administrators is selecting staff members who share values and beliefs about education that are compatible with the school community. The goal is not to avoid conflict, but to establish a core group of educators that share some common ideological and educational goals.
- *Using Narrative*—Through storytelling principals can communicate important school values and traditions. A good storyteller builds a relationship with the listener through association. That is, the story establishes some common ground between speaker and audience. It also provides a vehicle for communicating important values of the institution. These value are often an implicit or hidden part of the story's meaning. Communities arise from committed relationships, and stories can convey the meaning of culture and help individuals form institutional bonds of attachment.
- *Learning from Failure*—Perhaps the most important quality of a strong leader is learning from failure. Leaders who are willing to recognize and admit failure are often viewed by staff members as more "human." Of course this does not mean that the principal should appear weak and tentative. Rather, strong decision-making and decisive action should be tempered with an honesty that encourages members of the institution to try new strategies and work with others to build community regardless of the potential failures.

These are just a few of the strategies that enhance school culture. Common to these approaches are shared values, a belief in collaboration, and concern for others. A broader focus on school culture allows leaders to establish rituals and traditions that can provide a cornerstone for building strong, caring communities within the school.

Developing a Coordinating Team

By definition, it is impossible for principals to create a sense of community without the help of teachers, parents, staff, and students. Communi-

ties are built with the help and support of all members. Principals can encourage the involvement of others by creating a coordinating team. This team can do the following:

- *assess the needs* of the existing community
- *create a vision* of the school as a community and set goals and benchmarks for the year
- *communicate* the vision and possible activities to other members of the school community, asking for their suggestions
- *plan and coordinate* schoolwide activities
- *assess each activity* and progress toward goals

This kind of planning builds collaboration and support among community members and frees up principals' time. Developing a healthy school community is one of many jobs that occupy the time of committed practitioners. The daily routines of school administration often can be overwhelming. A coordinating team allows principals to influence the direction of community-building strategies without taking sole responsibility for the project's implementation and success. Principals can model collaborative behaviors they would like to see in team members. Administrators also can provide the financial, human, and material resources necessary to make community-building stategies succeed.

According to Eric Schaps and others (1995), "Most schools with successful community-building programs have entrusted the conceptualization, planning, and implementation of these activities to a coordinating team, representing all constituencies of the school community—parents, teachers, administrators, school staff, and in some instances, upper-grade students."

Involving Teachers in School Community

Administrators will not be successful in building a caring community for students without the support of teachers and staff. The key to community-building is involving and showing support for all members of the school, but the role played by teachers, who have the most direct relationship with students, is especially important.

Community-building shares some similarities with collaboration. According to Smith and Scott (1990), "When teachers do work together, their example encourages students to do the same." Elements that foster teacher collaboration can also help kindle an ethic of caring that pervades the entire school culture.

Time

Many teachers believe the biggest obstacle in implementing schoolwide change is insufficient time. After teaching, developing daily lesson plans, grading papers, attending staff meetings, monitoring buses and halls, talking to parents, and filling out paperwork, teachers have little time to invest in school reform.

Principals are also constrained by time. The committed school leader spends time supervising students; working on policy changes; observing instruction; writing letters; attending district meetings; and communicating with parents, teachers, students, and staff. Principals' and teachers' duties make undertaking reform efforts seem nearly impossible.

School leaders dedicated to promoting community in the school must provide time for evaluation and introspection. As Kruse and others (1992) suggest, "There must be a formal process that provides substantial and regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct an ongoing self-examination and self-renewal." "Such periods," they note, "must be built into the school's schedule and calendar in a way that gives teachers opportunities to consider critical issues in a reflective manner."

Principals can start by scheduling meetings that focus solely on one desired goal: building school community. Retreats and workshops also help validate the importance of the reforms. But most important, principals need to adjust their daily schedules to make time for teachers.

Principals can also try to find common planning time for pairs of teachers during the day. "Various techniques, such as common preparation time, more opportunities to develop curriculum together, and support for peer instructional supervision are common elements for building a shared technical culture and teacher community," states Gary M. Crow (1994).

Likewise, principals can make time for informal gatherings; consider uniform policies that make "homerooms" the focus of important school-community issues (this process involves both teachers and students); and look for ways to reduce paperwork and bureaucracy so more time will be available for positive social interactions.

Meetings

Teachers can use meetings to share ideas and comment on potential policy changes. Collaboration is a key element in many successful school communities. Meetings provide time for teachers to interact and collaborate on community-building projects. Kruse and others suggest that "regular meetings... can provide a network for the exchange of ideas on instruction, curriculum, assessment, and other professional issues."

Professional Development

Principals can help teachers feel more a part of the learning community by allocating school time and money for professional development. One option is to invite educators to conduct seminars and workshops. This allows educators within the school to exchange knowledge and share areas of expertise. Paula A. Kleine-Kracht (1993) notes, "The teacher's role includes collegial interactions about learning and extends learning beyond the formal classroom setting. When a school is a community of learners, an inquisitive mindset is the mark of all the members of the school."

Professional development should also be offered outside the school setting. Incorporate views from both educators and other professionals. Use these opportunities to infuse the atmosphere with new ideas that inspire teachers and staff to work toward common educational goals.

Peer Coaching

In a true community of learners, members share insights and offer feedback. Peer-coaching arrangements enable teachers to observe their peers in the classroom. Peer coaching offers many potential benefits: (1) The observer gains insight into different teaching styles, (2) the instructor receives valuable feedback, and (3) the process builds collaboration and cooperation.

Shared Decision-Making

Among the best ways to enhance a school's learning community is to make teachers part of the decision-making process. The literature on shared decision-making advocates involving teachers and other staff members in creating visions for school change.

Micheal Fullan (1993), a strong advocate of shared decision-making, states, "The development of authentic shared vision builds on the skills of change agentry: personal vision building through moral purpose, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration." He reminds school leaders that shared decision-making does not mean all parties must reach consensus, but genuine shared decision-making must be a collaborative effort that allows all voices to be heard and considered.

Collaboration can generate valuable ideas and allow teachers, students, and staff to feel part of the process of change.

Open Communication

An open dialogue needs to be established between teachers and princi-

pals. School leaders should have an open-door policy. This allows teachers and students to feel their principal is accessible. Principals who actively seek out communication with other school members will undoubtedly build stronger school communities.

The Limits of Collaboration

While there are many benefits to increasing collaboration, school leaders must beware of "groupthink." As Fullan notes, "We drive a good idea to extremes." Shared decision-making, peer coaching, open communication, and meetings all have potential, but school leaders must be aware that these strategies can fail if they are not carefully planned and implemented.

Collaboration is not always beneficial. As Fullan points out, "People can collaborate to do the wrong things." The result may be to move an organization away from school community, or worse, toward a community that exercises poor judgment.

Involving Students in School Community

While it is important to involve teachers in the process of schoolwide change, students must not be overlooked, for they, too, can play an integral role in developing a strong sense of community. It is often students that feel most disenfranchised from the decision-making process.

Welcoming Newcomers

In a caring school community, students feel "at home." When students begin attending a school for the first time, they may feel socially isolated.

To help integrate new students into the school and make them feel at home, veteran students from the school community can form a "welcoming committee." Schoolwide committees can be established, or each classroom can appoint two or three students to fulfill this function. Committee members welcome new students, show them around the school, introduce them to other students, and, most important, familiarize them with the nuances of life at the school. This process exposes newcomers to "the values of caring, helping, and taking responsibility for others," which all play an integral part in "building a concerned community of students" (Schaps and others 1995).

At Seaside Heights Elementary in Seaside, Oregon, a number of different strategies are used to make newcomers feel welcome. Because of economic instability, Seaside has a 36 percent turnover rate. This high turnover makes welcoming new students an important party of the schools' mission.

As a first step, Principal Kathy Samsel encourages all students to write down names of people they meet that they don't know in a specially provided handbook. "This process, Samsel said, "helps kids pay attention to new people and prevents isolation." Using a central theme of caring, Samsel also has instituted a "buddy program." This program pairs model older students with younger newcomers or problem kids. Said Samsel, "The students are taught to look out and care for each other. These pairs sit together at lunch, take recess, and share classroom buddy projects." The pairs often build strong friendships as they learn about Seaside's rules and daily rituals.

These types of programs play a critical role in helping new students feel at home in a foreign environment. The process of welcoming also involves and makes veteran students feel like an integral part of a caring school community.

Schoolwide Interviews

Another way to involve students in community-building is to have them interview their teacher and at least one other staff person outside the classroom. The interviews can be assembled on a bulletin-board display and supplemented with such items as pictures of those interviewed and poems about school life. The goal of this type of activity is to explore the social ties and physical surroundings that make up the school experience. "As a result," say Schaps and others (1995), "students are likely to feel more comfortable with the adults who work with and around them each day."

Important Roles

For genuine shared decision-making to occur, students, especially at the high school level, should be given important leadership roles. These include memberships on community-building committees either as elected or appointed positions. Principals and teachers should make a concerted effort to involve students in the discussion.

In addition, principals might consider using committees of students to develop activities, offer suggestions about school spirit, and plan collaborative functions. Principals could arrange to meet with student leaders once a week to address student concerns and direction. Students must be given meaningful roles in planning for change if school reforms are to succeed.

Mentoring Programs

One way to encourage intelligent, responsible student leaders is through mentoring programs. Mentors serve as positive role models for other students. Mentors can be adults or older students who establish bonds

with younger students. Younger students may be more receptive to someone who is older but not yet an adult. Mentor programs "are most effective when mentors are paired with individual students with whom they meet regularly," according to Peggy Gonder and Donald Hymes (1994). Regular meetings create a sense of unity between participating students.

In addition to promoting community, mentoring programs have also been successful in motivating at-risk populations. Gonder and Hymes report that over a three-year period in San Antonio "some 700 mentors were working with students in seven elementary, middle, and high schools where student behavior and performance had markedly improved."

Mentoring programs can help build students' confidence and self-esteem as well as school unity by giving younger students role models in the form of older students or adults who are successful. In this sense, students can assess where they are and use a collaborative environment to get to where they want to be.

Conflict Resolution

Some schools are fraught with violence. Taking time for community-building in these schools may sound difficult or downright unrealistic. However, if administrators can successfully resolve conflict that erupts in their school, they may be taking the first step toward creating a communal school environment.

The Boston Conflict Resolution Program (BCRP) works with public school teachers, administrators, and students to solve conflicts in the school. Teachers agree to spend one hour a week working with their class on conflict resolution. Trainers provide ongoing help and new techniques for teachers (Gonder and Hymes).

Information on the Boston Conflict Resolution Program can be obtained by calling (617) 492-8820.

Service-Learning Programs

The Oregon Department of Education offers service-learning grants for community-building in schools. The grants are designed to fund programs that focus on the relationship between community service and academic learning. In so doing, these programs build teacher and student motivation, cooperation, and collaborative relationships. Although these programs extend beyond the walls of the school, they contribute to strong relationships among staff, teachers, and students within the school.

Service-learning programs build caring communities within the school by establishing a "service ethic." Students learn the value of sharing their

time and skills without looking for immediate self-gratification. The service ethic becomes part of the classroom environment. Caren Reese, principal at Damascus Middle School in Boring, Oregon, said, "The program builds motivation and cooperation that shows up both in the classroom and the larger community."

A service-learning grant allows each school to create its own unique program, one that best meets community needs and school objectives. The only requirement is that schools address eleven program areas. These include bridging service and academics, preparation and reflection, staff development, and systemic integration. The innovative ways in which three schools have used service-learning grants are highlighted below.

Damascus Middle School, Boring, Oregon

Damascus Middle School has a seven-member coordinating committee that oversees the service-learning program and makes recommendations on how the program should be implemented. Damascus involves 380 students in fifth through eighth grades in a variety of projects, such as peer tutoring, service for abused kids, elderly care, and multicultural awareness, to name just a few. In a designated home room, students have the opportunity to discuss issues they encounter as they complete their projects.

Since the program began, said Principal Caren Reese, "Teacher and student motivation has increased considerably." She noted that "students are more sensitive to the world around them, teachers and students feel they are making a meaningful contribution, and the program builds tremendous community support."

Troutdale Elementary School, Troutdale, Oregon

Troutdale Elementary School involves many teachers with diverse backgrounds in an integrated form of instruction. These teachers direct a number of different service-learning paths that focus on environmental awareness and protection. To better understand salmon life cycles, one group of third-graders hatched salmon eggs. They also participated in stream restoration. Another group of third-graders built bat houses to save some bats that were unwanted guests in a school's chimney.

"This isn't dry textbook stuff," reports Bill Kanudsen, counselor and project director. "These students are involved in real life." Kanudsen says the project is generating cooperation among staff and students, motivating teachers to "build these projects into the curriculum," and "creating an atmosphere of involvement."

Cascade Junior High School, Turner, Oregon

Cascade Junior High School focuses on different activities each day of the week. On Wednesdays seventh- and eighth-graders from Cascade serve as peer tutors at Turner Elementary School. They teach first- and second-graders how to read. They also lead other academic activities. On Thursdays, students help out at Marion Retirement Center, working with Alzheimers patients. Students serve meals and talk to residents. Many other activities fill the remaining days, including collecting clothes for the needy, preparing food baskets, and cleaning hallways of the school.

Shari Maksud, teacher and project director, said the program not only builds cooperation, but also helps new student leaders to emerge. Sometimes these are students who wouldn't ordinarily be thought of as having leadership potential. Maksud is also encouraged that more teachers are volunteering to devote time to the program. She noted, "I started with seventeen students last year. This year I have thirty and a waiting list to get into the program. So, I can use all the help I can get."

All three of these programs illustrate the potential of service-learning programs. They give students tangible, real-world experience that make a difference. Service learning helps students to understand the essence of community, instills a service ethic within the school, and enhances both the school community and the broader civic community.

The School as Place

Places are both real and imagined, states geographer Stephen Daniels. Physical space has a real and tangible quality. Yet at the same time we form bonds of attachment to places that are imagined. A sense of place refers to both the physical space and the feelings we have about a particular location.

The school as a place has both "real" (or physical) and emotional components. School grounds, hallways, classrooms, and offices define the "real" characteristics of place. Such things as the relationships we form with people at school and our memory of the physical space also color the associations we have to the school setting. Both physical qualities and emotional associations combine to create a sense of place.

Creating Smaller School Environments

Much of the research on school community deals with interaction among individuals. The notable exceptions are the studies on school size. Such studies emphasize the importance of creating a sense of place in the school. Smaller, more intimate settings are more conducive to strong school

community. As mentioned earlier, strong school communities are associated with smaller schools or at least smaller units within schools.

Larger schools can be divided into smaller "subschools." Diana Oxley explains: "Dividing large schools into smaller units, or subschools... creates a context for teaching and learning that is more stable, more intimate, and more supportive." The small units give students and teachers a sense of belonging. They also provide continuity to instruction, say Wynne and Walberg (1994).

Oxley suggests that subschools are easier to administer. In addition, they create a context that is more stable for teaching and learning. They lend themselves to decentralized decision-making "in which unit leaders assume authority to orchestrate unit activities." Unit leaders are also in a prime position to communicate with parents, teachers, staff, and students. "The tension between administrators and instructors that normally exists in large schools with centralized management is less likely to develop," Oxley states.

Creating smaller environments in the school establishes closer bonds between unit members, simplifies administration, and enhances a sense of place.

Physical Space

Administrators may be cognizant of the importance of variables such as school and classroom size. "School restructuring efforts have not, however, addressed the physical learning environment as a support system for education," according to Anne Taylor (1993).

Reevaluating the physical space involves more than attending to building maintenance. In many respects, the places we inhabit define us and determine how we perform as teachers, students, and administrators. As Taylor notes, "We expect school to prepare children for living in a democratic society, yet we provide a learning environment that resembles a police state—hard, overly durable architecture, giant chain-link fences, locked gates, guards, and even guard dogs."

Some architectural solutions may be beyond the scope of school budgets and community support. But other changes are more practical and less costly. Taylor identifies some features that can enhance the school environment, create a positive sense of place, and encourage learning:

- Flexible, movable, and changeable furniture provides multiple uses.
- Horizontal and vertical work surfaces that are designed for individual or group work enhance creativity and productivity.
- Schools should have places for growing plants, such as courtyards, atriums, and commons, and students can be involved in care of the plants.

- Partitions can be used to create private places.
- Teachers should have space for dialogue and planning, with a professional library close to the work area.
- Benches can be used to provide space for small-group interaction among students. Benches are communal meeting places for students and staff.
- Open areas with tables offer places to work and meet.
- Hallways are vertical and horizontal learning surfaces. They offer space for graphics, displays for student artwork, or informational minimuseum exhibits.
- Architecturally, schools should be simple, designed to be operated and maintained as much as possible by users.

Small physical changes can contribute to school community. Efforts as simple as bringing more plants into classrooms, hanging student art in hallways, decorating offices and classrooms, planting trees or gardens on school grounds, leaving office doors open, and moving furniture to create common spaces can help create a sense of purpose and community.

The school is a reflection of the people who work there. The physical environment conveys messages to parents and other visitors about the school. More important, the physical surroundings affect teacher and student performance and relationships. Ultimately, school leaders need to ask themselves, Does the school environment create a positive sense of place, and, if not, how can it be changed to enhance the learning community?

Schools are workplaces, social environments, and learning establishments. How people feel about the school, both its inhabitants and physical space, has a profound effect on the bonds of commitment among students, teachers, staff, and administrators. These perceptions encourage or impede the development of a genuine sense of school community.

Conclusion

Twenty-three percent of children birth to five live in poverty, and 80 percent of America's one million prisoners are high school dropouts (Fullan). These numbers suggest that schools preparing for the twenty-first century must concentrate on more than merely providing academic basics. As violence, drug abuse, teen pregnancy, poverty, and other issues encroach on the school environment, administrators must be prepared to address these problems with creative solutions.

Developing cohesive social relations in schools is a step in the right direction. While some personal freedoms may be sacrificed, long-term benefits will accrue from the creation of strong social networks. Teachers, students, and staff will be more inspired and motivated, and administrators will find their time well spent in building strong school communities.

Take time, ask questions, focus on relationships not just accomplishments, provide appropriate education for all, and pay attention to the physical and emotional environment. These are the essential characteristics of strong communities. Educators who embrace these qualities will build a healthy, stable, creative community within the school.

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